

## Bluffdale hurting at the seams

High amount of staff turnover is putting strain on city workings

By CATHY MCKITRICK  
*The Salt Lake Tribune*

BLUFFDALE — This beleaguered south Salt Lake Valley city is showing signs of strain.

The loss of Administrative Services Director Brent Bluth — installed as city manager by the City Council last fall and twice fired by Mayor Claudia Anderson — has left a gaping hole in how the city functions, says Councilman Bill Maxwell.

"He was the heartbeat of the staff and had a pulse on the whole situation," Maxwell said of city veteran Bluth. "When she threw him out of the middle, it caused some real problems."

Bluth wasn't Anderson's only target. When she took office in January 2006, she quickly replaced four of the city's five planning commissioners, and the city is on its third planner. Bluffdale also is facing legal action by dissatisfied developers who threaten to disconnect 4,000 acres.

And other developers voiced concerns Tuesday that city-approval processes, because of staff turnover, have slowed down their projects.

"The current situation evolved, one thing after another," said Bluffdale resident and developer Johnny Loumis.

Loumis, a Planning Commission member ousted by Anderson, said Wednesday that he was bothered that the mayor put in "a whole new administration in planning ... but they've adjusted well."

Contention between the council and mayor peaked last fall over concerns about staff retention and Anderson's first firing of Bluth.

The council responded by creating a city-manager position and hiring Bluth to fill it.

Anderson then sued the council and lost. But her supporters launched a petition drive to let voters decide the mayor's powers, and the council backed off, saying they would schedule a special election in June.

By mid-January, Anderson had re-fired Bluth and hired former state Rep. David Hogue as interim administrative-

services director.

The council in late February passed an ordinance rejecting Hogue's status as a city employee.

But nothing has changed. Hogue still takes his staff seat during council meetings, is being paid a salary and occupies a City Hall office.

"The mayor hired me ... they can't take it away from the mayor," Hogue said, claiming that while "statutes are ambiguous on this, the mayor has the sole right to choose her deputies and assistants without any advice or consent," Hogue said.

He said the ambiguity comes in where another place in the statute "talks about department heads needing advice and consent."

"The council refuses to acknowledge Mr. Hogue. We don't consider him an employee," Maxwell said, who worries about what will happen come April as the council heads into budget sessions without the knowledgeable Bluth.

"He spearheaded the whole thing over the last three to four years," Maxwell said.

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